

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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MEMORANDUM FOR:

MR. KISSINGER

FROM:

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SUBJECT:

New Communist Emphasis on Countering  
Pacification -- Back to Basics

A new emphasis on countering pacification is reflected in recent articles in the North Vietnamese Army daily Quan Doi Nhan Dan (QDND) and in new COSVN instructions. Cadre have been instructed to return to basics in rebuilding the political and military structure needed to cope with the "temporary realities" of GVN success in the countryside.

Only recently do the Communists seem to have become fully aware that their success in South Vietnam entirely depends on effectively countering pacification. They had been concerned about the dangers of pacification since early 1969 (if not before); however, they initially failed to realize that, in the aftermath of the Tet offensive, the "accelerated pacification campaign" would be far more successful than past such programs. Prior to 1970, Hanoi probably also believed that the pacification effort largely depended on the presence of regular Allied units. When large numbers of ARVN forces were diverted from pacification during the Cambodian intrusion, pacification, nevertheless, proceeded apace. Moreover, the disruption of Communist logistics in Cambodia greatly aided pacification. (COSVN Political Officer General Tran Do, in fact, publicly admitted that the Cambodian intrusion gave the GVN an eight month gain in pacification.)

Hanoi began to realize that it had been ill-informed about the intrinsic strength of pacification, and instructed cadre in the field to institute their own "Hamlet Evaluation System" (HES). Subsequent VC "HES" reports no doubt gave Hanoi a clearer idea of what it was up against in the South Vietnam countryside. This, in turn, resulted in considerably increased emphasis on countering pacification through a combination of political and military measures. This approach, however, came to naught because of a dearth of both political and military assets.

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In the meantime, other matters gained priority. First came LAM SON 719 and then the GVN election campaign. Only by exploiting the political dissension and turmoil associated with the elections could Hanoi hope to make any rapid political gains in the South. The Communist side had, to a limited extent, even believed in the possibility of an anti-Thieu coup.

These hopes failed to materialize and the Communists were largely ineffective in exploiting a rare opportunity to improve their position in the urban areas. Thieu won and was assured of continued U.S. support; moreover, organized anti-GVN opposition crumbled. There no longer remained any hope of easy political gains, and the Communists were forced to concentrate on the laborious, but essential, task of reversing pacification through a step-by-step rebuilding of their apparatus in the countryside -- going back to basics.

As QDND noted, in combatting pacification, the Communists have had to conduct an "extremely fierce struggle"...and "retake one village and hamlet after the other...This...has brought about major changes in the war." The paper indicated that the "anti-pacification fight" was essential both to political gains (in the countryside and cities) and to main force operations. It warned that this fight can "never be belittled or neglected and we cannot be optimistic nor belittle the enemy schemes." This clearly implies that, heretofore, pacification had not been realistically confronted.

Quan Doi Nhan Dan described in relatively sober detail pacification techniques which, it asserted, are based on Sir Robert Thompson's theories on the primacy of population control. The paper noted that whereas Kennedy hoped to achieve pacification in 18 months and Johnson in two years, Nixon (on Thompson's advice) advocates a 10 to 15 year program. Moreover, unlike his two predecessors, Nixon sees pacification as "a basic strategic measure" to be supported by "all military activities."

According to QDND, the essential elements of "Nixon's very perfidious pacification plan" are:

-- Relocating "compatriots" ("people-herding") to areas under GVN control and turning the rest of the countryside into "deserts or no man's lands";

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The Political Task

Both QDND and the COSVN instructions describe how "firm political bases" are to be built. The latter stresses the importance of exploiting local anti-GVN grievances and carefully selecting local GVN officials, police, etc. for assassination. As QDND put it: "By annihilating a ringleader we frighten a whole unit."

In implementing these instructions, local cadre -- those closest to the people -- are to be given increased autonomy and flexibility in order to increase grass roots support and rebuild the Party apparatus. Legal cadre (those who live openly in GVN-controlled areas) are also to be used to infiltrate and subvert bona fide groups and organizations as well as GVN military and self-defense units.

In short, the Communists realize that little progress can be made in combatting pacification without increased popular support -- achieved through either persuasion or force. As QDND stressed: "Only when the masses are ideologically stirred and reorganized" will Communists be able to "continue their protracted, fierce fight." Recently in Peking (November 20) Premier Pham Van Dong described the anti-pacification effort as "the political struggle in the countryside."

Shifts in Administrative Boundaries

The Communists have reportedly redrawn provincial and administrative boundaries probably to enhance the new emphasis on grass roots political organization. In Military Regions 3 and 4 there has been a consolidation of provinces and subregions, disbanding of some provincial committees (in MR 3) and the reassignment of many district cadre to the village level. This move was designed to release scarce cadre for the lower level political activity now being emphasized.

In the sparsely settled northern central highlands, four new provinces have reportedly been formed along South Vietnam's western border. Here the Communists might believe they have the best chances of building "revolutionary bases." They do not expect the ARVN to penetrate this remote area, as did U.S. forces. Moreover, a higher level of infiltration into this area provides more cadre for all levels than are available elsewhere. Also, there is less need for indigenous cadre in the highlands.

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-- Creating a "very dangerous spy network," Phoenix, targetted against the infrastructure; (The Communists have been far more concerned about Phoenix than is generally realized.)

-- Deploying police to harass VC in the villages, a "new, barbarous move of the enemy";

-- Fortifying villages defended by PSDF, police, an intelligence network and "combat youth platoons";

-- Organizing village councils and family groups;

-- Establishing military posts near cities, along main communication lines and intersections and in "the concentration camps [resettlement areas] and strategic hamlets" in order to "isolate the revolutionary forces in rural areas and prevent the PLAF's strong attacks";

-- Conducting psychological warfare by creating a "fake prosperity" in GVN-controlled areas, intensifying the Chieu Hoi campaign, and by "sowing disunity and confusion among the people and stirring doubts about the revolution. "

### Measures to Counter Pacification

#### Building "Revolutionary Bases"

QDND stated categorically that "only by building firm revolutionary bases can there be a strong anti-U.S. -puppet struggle movement." It further called for the building of "firm political bases" to be used in developing the guerrilla forces and for fighting while strengthening these forces.

Significantly the paper cited Binh Dinh as a model province where "revolutionary bases have grown stronger." Binh Dinh is one of the few provinces in which Communist main force units (2 regiments) are stationed on a continuing basis. U Minh, which also has main force units, was the other area cited where "guerrillas still operated vigorously." This was probably an unintended admission of Communist dependency on the presence of main force units in developing "revolutionary bases" and in conducting the guerrilla warfare needed to expand Communist control.

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Use of Armed Forces

Despite present emphasis on political action, the military aspect of counter pacification has not been neglected. Here the emphasis is to be on low level attacks against isolated outposts (to "smash the enemy's rural defense system"), "strategic hamlets," and those marked for assassination.

QDND further states:

-- "Only by smashing scores of enemy strategic hamlets in each area" can the Communists enlarge areas under their control and "achieve liaison among their bases."

-- "Only by smashing strategic hamlets and concentration camps in large chunks" can a "new situation" be created and the GVN's rural defense system be shaken.

-- "Only by launching concerted, large-scale offensive waves under a unified plan will the southern armed forces and people be able to achieve high combat efficiency, deal the enemy vigorous blows and demolish military subsectors. Close coordination among the regional forces is of great significance in supporting the regional people's forces in attacking fortified positions and in smashing U.S. -puppet counteroffensives."

QDND had also stated that the anti-pacification fight was to create "conditions for the development of military operations in strategic areas." ("Strategic areas" generally means where Communist main force units are based or where they have the greatest advantage.)

Conclusion

Since the abortive Tet offensive, the Communists have been caught in a vicious circle. The subsequent weakening of the Communist military and political position in the countryside enabled the GVN to pacify a large part of the countryside. This, in turn, denied the Communists the supplies, manpower, intelligence and other essential support mainly provided by the population. Without this support, the main force units were hindered in supporting the guerrilla forces essential to the infrastructure in controlling the population -- and so on. In short, until more of the population is brought under Communist control, the main force operations essential to victory will be limited.

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Whether the new emphasis on building grass roots support will succeed -- where all else has failed -- remains doubtful. The downgrading of district cadre to the village and hamlet level will certainly create morale problems. These cadre will no doubt resent such apparent demotions and furthermore will be exposed to considerably greater danger in trying to work among the population.

The granting of increased autonomy to local cadre has not worked too well in the past. Without tight supervision and control, many cadre tend to shirk their responsibilities and remain under cover. A principal strength of the Communist side is its organization and discipline, and this will be debilitated by increased lower level autonomy.

It will also be difficult for the Communists effectively to exploit popular grievances in the countryside where GVN support is the strongest. Even those opposed to the GVN still, in most areas, prefer it to Communist control.

The new approach to pacification does not seem to anticipate much direct main force support in the near future except along the fringes of South Vietnam where these forces hopefully can engage the ARVN and divert it from pacification tasks. Presumably Communist "regional forces" (guerrillas, local forces, etc.) are to increase their efforts, in "close coordination," during such main force encounters. This, however, will be also easier said than done.

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